

Closing Remarks
Christian Hougen, Chief, OEDG
Launching of the Bayanihang Eskwela: the
Citizen's Monitoring of DPWH-implemented
School Building Projects Toolkit
Ateneo Professional School Amphitheater
Rockwell, Makati City
October 15, 2007, 10:00 to 12:00 a.m.

Our host, Dean Antonio La Vina of the Ateneo
School of Government;

Distinguished guests from the Philippine
Government (names to be supplied on site);

Our partners in development, friends, ladies
and gentlemen;

Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat.

On behalf of the United States Government,
I am delighted to join you this morning to

close the launching of the monitoring toolkit of the Bayanihang Eskwela Project.

We wish to congratulate the Ateneo School of Government's G-Watch project and its partners in government, the Department of Education, the Department of Public Works and Highways and the Office of the Ombudsman, and the participating civil society organizations for implementing this innovative approach to combating corruption.

There is a widely held consensus among the international community that corruption and poor governance deter foreign investment and cripple economic growth and development. It is common knowledge that corruption

undermines social cohesion and broad participation in economic and political life because it distorts the allocation of resources and the delivery of public services, usually in ways that particularly injure the poor.

The simple translation of what I just said is that corruption wastes precious resources that the Philippines can ill afford to lose. Money that goes into the pockets of individuals who connive to deliver ghost school buildings or construct substandard structures is money stolen from underprivileged children who are forced to share overcrowded classrooms, attend classes

under the shade of trees, or, worse, have no school at all to go to.

Fighting corruption is an important U.S. foreign policy objective. The *Bayanihang Eskwela: The Citizens' Monitoring of DPWH-Implemented School Building Projects* is an activity that the American people, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is happy to support. We applaud the concept and design of this citizen-initiated monitoring and reporting mechanism where (a) the government can generate third-party information about the status of its projects, (b) local implementers and contractors are made more responsive and accountable to the demand for

cost-effective and high quality projects,
and (c) citizens' oversight prevents
corruption and substandard work.

Personally, I especially, applaud the active
involvement of young Filipinos, represented
by the boy scouts, in this activity. You
are the embodiment of the words of your
national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal, when he said
that the youth are the hope of the
motherland. I truly hope that you will
continue to have the idealism that burns
brightly in your hearts when you become the
leaders of this nation in the future.

I had the opportunity to see an advance copy
of the toolkit we are launching today, and

read about your documented cases of poor implementation of school building projects such as the "one-wall" school building in Leyte and an abandoned project in Benguet that was reported as 100% completed.

Occurrences like these are indeed very compelling arguments for increased monitoring and citizen oversight, and it is a credit to your efforts that these sham activities were exposed and addressed.

USAID is inspired by your commitment and your achievements so far. We will endeavor to continue supporting community-based oversight and watchdog activities, and the continuing education of citizens about their roles in preventing corruption. Hopefully,

the toolkit we launch today will help make the challenging task of monitoring the construction of school buildings by non-engineers easier by providing a simple and user-friendly checklist as a guide.

Once more, USAID extends its heartfelt congratulations to G-Watch of the Ateneo University's School of Government, the Department of Education, the Department of Public Works and Highways, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Boy Scouts of the Philippines, the parents-teachers-community associations, and the parents and schoolchildren, without whose dedication and zeal, none of this would have been made possible.

I look forward to hearing more about your work.

Maraming salamat po at mabuhay tayong lahat!